

With spring just around the corner, you may be preparing to get out the broom and sweep away the dust and cobwebs that accumulated in your house over the winter. For Democrats in Congress, we have just begun the housekeeping necessary to attend to unfinished business and important priorities left unaddressed by the previous Congress.

For instance, earlier this month the House passed three clean water bills that until now had been blocked from action on the House floor. One of the bills reauthorized a program that last year alone delivered more than \$27 million to Maryland to help the state and local communities pay for building and improving wastewater treatment facilities. All three measures, which authorize major investments in wastewater infrastructure and anti-pollution measures, will significantly help Maryland address water quality problems, promote public health, create jobs and stimulate economic development.

Cleaning house continued this past week as the House passed a series of long overdue bills to make enhance government accountability and transparency and protect taxpayers from waste, fraud, abuse and corruption. The approved legislation included measures to: increase public access to government information by strengthening the Freedom of Information Act; provide whistleblower protections to federal workers; nullify an executive order giving former presidents and vice presidents broad authority to withhold presidential records or to delay their release indefinitely; require the disclosure of donors to presidential libraries; and increase oversight of federal no-bid contracts.

Taken in context with what the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress has already put in place, it is another strong step forward in reclaiming Congress' constitutional responsibility to conduct real, meaningful oversight - as well as our values of openness and transparency. As I said in a statement on the House floor, 'The days of hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil are over.'

Also, in the week ahead, the House will make significant headway in addressing other key priorities left over from the last Congress, such as fully funding the 2005 BRAC plan, expanding assistance for communities still struggling to rebuild after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and fulfilling the needs of the State Children's Health Insurance Program, which helps states provide coverage to millions of uninsured kids. Due to a failure to adequately provide funding for these areas in the last Congress, many states were facing significant shortfalls, including the state of Maryland.

In a visit to Capitol Hill this week to discuss the state's 2008 federal priorities, Governor Martin O'Malley emphasized how critical both BRAC funding and children's health care are to the state of Maryland, and I was pleased to report the House is acting to address these crucial needs.

Probably one of the biggest jobs ahead of us is cleaning up the fiscal mess left after six years of irresponsible budgeting, borrowing and spending. One of the actions already taken by the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress to wipe away the red ink was to restore budget enforcement rules requiring the federal government to pay within its means, just as Maryland families must do. These budget rules, referred to as pay-as-you-go, were integral to achieving the balanced budgets and surpluses of the late 1990's, but had been disavowed by the Administration and the

previous Congressional Leadership unwilling to exercise real fiscal discipline.

Putting our fiscal house in order is just one of the many ways the new Democratic Majority intends to set the nation's priorities straight and change the way business is done in Washington. While we may not reasonably be able to do it all in one spring - or in one year for that matter – we are off to an incredibly strong start and have already honored several of our promises. The cleaning of the House has just begun.